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## **Chapter 21**

### **Using Supervision: Support or Surveillance?**

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This chapter will:

- Analyse supervision of staff in relation to developmental and managerial functions;
- Argue that pressures on social services organisations have ensured that the need for agency accountability far outweighs its developmental function;
- Suggest that the need for professional supervision is greatly enhanced given the development of inter-professional working arrangements;
- Propose that approaches to supervision can be applied to social work that have first been developed in the health service.

#### **Introduction**

A belief in the importance of the supervision of social workers has a lengthy history within the personal human services. Practitioners within the sector talk about 'good, effective or supportive supervision', implying there are agreed notions as to

the positive qualities inherent in this relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Furthermore, there has been an axiomatic assumption that 'quality' supervision has fulfilled a number of functions within social work (guiding, supportive, educative, developmental and quality management) in equal measure. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Hawkins and Shohet (1989) and Kadushin (1992) and indeed this concept relates back to the early work of John Dawson (1926).

'Good' supervision has come to be seen as a precondition for effective managerial practice in social work. A cursory glance at the fatal child abuse inquiries from the mid 1980s onwards, such as those concerning Tyra Henry (Lambeth, 1986) Kimberley Carlisle (Southwark, 1987), through to the Victoria Climbié report (Laming, 2003) and parallel inquiries such as the Allitt Inquiry (Clothier, 1994), demonstrates the importance that is placed upon practitioners' supervision and the reports collectively endorse the notion that practice is made 'safe' by effective supervision (and that, conversely, inadequate supervision results in 'unsafe' practice).

Indeed, Recommendation 45 of the Laming Report (2003) states that:

Directors of social services must ensure that the work of staff working directly with children is regularly supervised. This must include the supervisor reading, reviewing and signing the case file at regular intervals.

The General Social Care Council's (GSCC) Code of Practice (2003), and the Leadership and Management Standards for Social Care developed for post

qualifying programmes (Skills for Care, 2005) both reinforce the centrality of supervision for effective practice.

However, the practice of supervision is not without tensions. The concept has contested meaning and the functions that it serves are determined by a myriad of factors, which include the values and beliefs of those who manage and influence the process. The move toward greater levels of partnership working and new administrative arrangements within and between departments of Adult Care Services, Children's Services, Health and Education all provide unique contexts for emerging and revised supervision practices. The process of supervision per se is a relatively new construct within health, particularly in mental health practice (Bernard and Goodyear, 2003), and those who provide *clinical* supervision may not necessarily be the line manager of the supervisee. Furthermore, supervision for newly qualified staff is not an intrinsic element of practice within the arena of education (at primary, secondary and tertiary levels). Additionally, tensions have arisen from the emergence of New Right ideologies, introducing market relations into the public sector and advancing the process of managerialisation and the 'New Public Manager' role (see Chapter 22). Such factors have led to greater levels of accountability and managerial control within social work practice; as Briskman (2005: 208) asserts, "... social work is increasingly working within a managerialist framework".

Given this set of conditions, it is the aim of this chapter to critically reflect upon the purpose of supervision within these structures. We argue that there is a danger that the essentially supportive elements of classical supervision may be compromised at the expense of managerial surveillance. We also argue that an essential element of professional responsibility is the obligation to be clear about one's support and developmental needs, and that competent workplaces need to

construct processes that ensure the needs of practitioners and their managers are met in equal measure.

According to Argyris and Schön, (1996: 215), flexible, developmental organisations are characterised as: "... responsible, productive and creative, and where errors are seen as the vehicle for learning". Unfortunately, 'modern' social work organisations suffer from the convictions that no mistakes are tolerable, and therefore the sole goal of supervision is in danger of becoming the elimination of risk through the micro-management and surveillance of practitioners and their outcomes. If the paramount discourse in the supervisor/supervisee relationship has indeed become one of corporate surveillance of the practitioner, then it is hardly surprising that research by Jones (2001: 552) has found that "social workers felt they were no longer trusted or acknowledged for their skills and abilities", pointing to "anguish over the growing intensity of bureaucracy and paperwork" and the "speed up of work and the prevalence of poor and sometimes aggressive managerialism". Apparently social workers feel managed, but are they supervised?

### **What is supervision?**

Whilst the term has many interpretations, we begin with the perceptions of classical management theory, which imply that supervision is a management activity singularly concerned with overseeing the productivity and progress of staff. As such the term has connotations with direct control, discipline and surveillance and is axiomatic within Max Weber's concept of heteronomous professional organisations (Weber, 1947), in which staff who hold professional qualifications are progressively subordinated to administrative control. It may be argued that it is this hierarchical and bureaucratic conception of the managerial function that

dominates contemporary social work practice and thus influences the prevailing constructions of functional supervision.

However, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS, 2003) identify the role of supervision as 'supporting, developing and motivating'. This relates to the concept of a 'Learning Organisation' that is defined as:

... organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

(Senge, 1990: 3: see also Chapter 18))

However laudable these sentiments may be, Senge et al (2005) recognise that this is an aspirational vision - rather than an independent reality - of an organisation to which people may wish to belong (expressed in the current populist truism of organisations aspiring to be an *employer of choice*). Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2005) highlights the importance that employees place on developmental opportunities, which they directly link to greater levels of job satisfaction and consequently better staff retention.

ACAS's humanistic views are congruent with the language of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which is an ongoing, planned learning process that enables practitioners to update professional knowledge and skills, with the presumed outcomes of improved competence and enhanced outcomes for service users – including better protection in the case of vulnerable persons. Engaging in CPD activities is highlighted in the GSCC's Code of Practice for Social Care Workers

and Employers (GSCC, 2003) and undertaking post qualifying learning has become a precondition for practitioners to maintain their professional registration. In this sense, social work has 'caught up' with the CPD arrangements for nurses, doctors, lawyers and other professions. Indeed, as social workers are *knowledge* workers - people who are typically defined as being well educated, highly skilled and people who work with knowledge – then Moyo's following assertion is significant to this debate:

Since information is at the core of the information society, information workers and other knowledge workers will be key players in this society. In order for information professionals to play their role effectively, they will have to be individually and collectively proactive in addressing the competency issues that enable them to remain relevant in a dynamic environment ...

(Moyo, 2002: 125)

This illustrates the duality at play: one school of thought regards supervision as having concern for *production* (and the associated requirements for target setting; performance management; quality control; and monitoring) whilst the other focuses on *people* (and the associated language of leadership; coaching; lifelong learning; and developing potential). To some, such an apparent dichotomy might illustrate the diversity and flexibility of post-modernism, in which concerns for both performance outcomes *and* resources development are seen as being of equal importance as complementary managerial responsibilities.

These elements can be seen in the work of different writers such as Proctor (1987, 1991), Hawkins and Shohet (1989) Brown and Bourne (1995) and Kadushin (1992), who highlights three main functions of supervision:

- **Educational:** This concerns the educational development of practitioners and the fulfilment of their potential. The primary foci of attention concerns their lack of competence regarding understanding, knowledge, skills and, importantly, their attitude toward their role. The goals of supervision are to encouraging reflection and exploration of the work and develop new insights, perceptions and ways of working.
- **Supportive:** This involves supervisors providing support for both the practical and psychological elements of a practitioner's role. Primary issues of concern in this area are stress levels, morale and job satisfaction.
- **Administrative:** This concerns the promotion and maintenance of good standards of work and the adherence to organisational policies and those of other key stakeholders, such as the GSCC, CSCI and OfSTED. In essence this is the quality assurance dimension within supervision.

In a similar vein, Proctor (1991) has described the three functions of supervision as Formative, Restorative and Normative. By focusing on process models, Hawkins and Shohet (1989) list ten separate areas in relation to Kadushin's (1992) functions.

**Figure 21.1: Primary Foci of Supervision.** Adapted from Hawkins and Shohet (1989: 43)

To provide a regular space for the supervisees to reflect upon the content and process of their work	Educational
To develop understanding and skills within the work	Educational
To receive information and another perspective concerning one's work	Educational/Supportive
To receive both content and process feedback	Educational/Supportive



To be validated and supported both as a person and as a worker	Supportive
To ensure that as a person and as a worker one is not left to carry unnecessarily difficulties, problems and projections alone	Supportive
To have space to explore and express personal distress, re-stimulation, transference or counter-transference that may be brought up by the work	Administrative
To plan and utilize their personal and professional resources better	Administrative
To be pro-active rather than re-active	Administrative
To ensure quality of work	Administrative/Supportive

Whilst Kadushin's (1992) work has been found to be helpful within social work, it nevertheless emphasises a *deficit* model, whereby the worker is deemed to be lacking in some area. Aligned to this is the notion of dependence. Many models of supervision put the emphasis on the supervisor to take some form of action. Rather than creating independent, self-regulating practitioners, this form of managerialist leadership can engender a relationship of reliance and dependency - in itself somewhat antithetical to social work values. Nevertheless, this mode of supervision may promote reflexivity, and critical reflection, which sits at the heart of effective assessments and interventions.

**Q.** To what extent has your experience of supervision promoted reflexivity and critical reflection?

### **The reflective practitioner**

Our perceptions, appreciations, and beliefs are rooted in worlds of our own making which we come to accept as reality.

(Schön, 1987: 36)

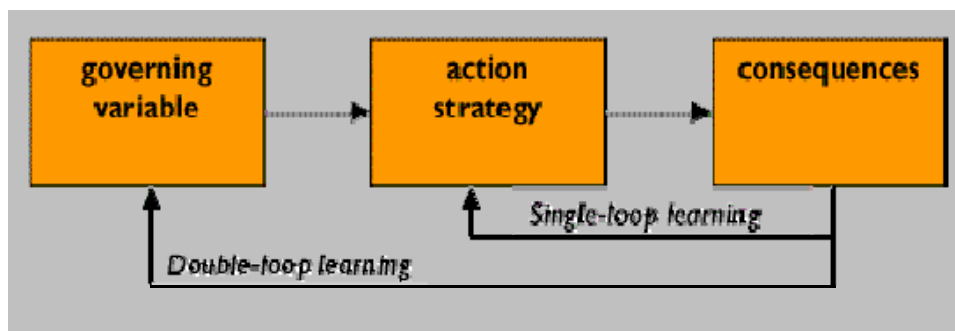
Schön (1987) highlights two aspects of reflection: *reflection-in-action*, and *reflection-on-action*. Whilst the latter occurs *post hoc*, within the supervision session, and enables the worker spend time exploring practice, such as: why they may have acted in a particular way, the results of their actions, and how different actions may have produced different outcomes. In doing this a set of questions and ideas about activities and practice are developed. The former draws upon reflexivity in *situ* (and may draw upon the supervisory relationship via coached responses to difficult situations) and gives greater coherence and structure to the function of 'conceptualization' in Kolb's (1984) concept of experiential learning (see figure 19.1).

The concept of experiential learning aids our understanding of reflexive activity. Supervisors may begin by asking supervisees to return to a situation and to attend to their feelings. They may then encourage the practitioner to draw relationships with other situations. The next stage may be to help supervisees to make judgements and build theories about why they acted in a particular way, and think about what they may do differently in a similar situation. Supervisees may then take that plan into a future scenario which in turn may stimulate further reflection.

Kolb's and Schön's work have both been subject to criticism, in that they require the practitioner's commitment and competence to fully engage with the process. Argyris and Schön (1996) argue that our actions are guided by *theories-in-use*, which are based on implicit assumptions and values. When we attempt to solve problems we

correct perceived errors in such a way as to maintain the assumptions and values that lie behind our *theory-in-use*, and we learn how to do better by improving performance within our current paradigms, a process associated with Single Loop Learning. For Double Loop or Transformative learning (Mezirow 2000) to occur - which is concerned with breaking out of our current mindset - we need to move beyond our *theories-in-use* (as shown in figure 21.2) by opening them up to questioning and challenge. We can then understand why we think and do certain things, leading to potentially radical changes in our way of seeing and understanding the world.

**Figure 21.2: Single and Double Loop Learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996).**



Such a process is a hallmark of 'quality' supervision that moves beyond organisational concerns (the managerial agenda of the supervisor) and engenders transformative learning. It may also lead to greater levels of empowerment, albeit within existing power structures.

### **Line management supervisory relationship**

An environment of mutual trust is required to engender this mutual questioning of *theories-in-use*. However, a study in the mid 1990s illustrated the depth of the

potential discord between the agendas of the supervisors (on behalf of the Department) and the supervisees (in terms of their professional objectives). In this study, 44% of those interviewed agreed with the statement “I feel my values are different from the Department’s values” (Balloch et al, 1995: 93). For the person being supervised, such an affective and cognitive dissonance between the professional self–concept and the managed ‘employee self’ can result in various ways of ‘making out,’ such as operating defensive routines which result in ineffectual supervision.

It is common in social work for those who conduct supervision to be the line managers of the supervisee. Those who occupy managerial roles have a level of *power* (the actual ability to control others) and *authority* (the perceived and ascribed right to do so). French and Raven (1960) identified five sources of social power:

**Figure 21.3: Perceived Sources of Power (French and Raven, 1960)**

- Reward Power      A person may give or take away a reward
- Coercive Power      A person is in a position to administer a punishment
- Legitimate Power      A person has the organisational right to prescribe actions and or make decisions
- Referent Power      The identification someone has with another person and their feeling of similarity and understanding or desire to be similar to them
- Expert Power      A person has specific knowledge and understanding, which is greater than their own.

The first three types of power arise from the supervisor's position; the last two (referent and expert) are a result of the supervisor's personal and professional qualities. Aspects of power are socially constructed in the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee, and the perception each has of the other's competence will impact on the process. If, for example, the supervisor has little confidence in the knowledge, understanding or ability of the supervisee, then they may feel the need to adopt greater levels of surveillance, albeit complemented by higher levels of support. Indeed, a worker new to their role may welcome higher levels of surveillance and support, and the supervisor may feel it is a necessary part of ensuring service user protection.

**Q.** Is your experience of supervision more oriented to support or surveillance functions? What have been the consequences of the approach adopted?

Hawkins and Shohet (1989: 49-51) highlight a four-stage development model that suggests supervisors may adopt a different approach depending on the supervisee's stage of competence:

- Level one signifies a high level of dependency by the supervisee on their supervisor
- Level two is characterised by supervisees who, having overcome their initial concern, fluctuate between dependence and autonomy and between over confidence and being overwhelmed
- Level three supervisees have increased self-confidence and only conditional dependency on the supervisor.
- At level four supervisees have reached proficiency in their profession and require personal autonomy.

However, the “Halo and Horns” effect influences these levels. In the Halo effect, workers are perceived as highly competent, because they exhibit desired qualities that mirror and match the supervisor’s self-concept - “I’m OK, so therefore he/she is” – and thus surveillance is low, autonomy high. In the Horns effect, the reverse is true – the practitioner exhibits behaviours that are anathema to the supervisor, and thus surveillance is high, and autonomy low. *Recency Bias* causes another skewing dynamic, whereby recent performance (positive or negative) overshadows an objective perception of performance.

Other factors may create circumstances that tend towards *supervision-as-surveillance*. When a supervisor takes over a well established team, s/he may feel outside of the group, causing the adoption of autocratic behaviours while attempting to establish her/his presence. The dynamics engendered through gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ideology and personality orientations may cause significant differences of understanding. Transference may occur, with supervisor, or supervisee, or both, replaying the past within the current relationship, or there may be a confusion of relationship. Tsui (2005) identifies 3 kinds of relationship, each having implications for the way supervision is enacted:

1. The relationship is based upon subordination, which may cause the process to be more hierarchical, autocratic and administratively orientated and may lead to reduced willingness to share problems in an honest and open way;
2. There is a perceived professional peer relationship, which may lead to greater levels of personal development and growth orientation; and
3. The relationship is based on friendship, which may be more supportive, but within which it may be difficult to address highly sensitive and problematic areas.

However, supervision has a wider context and involves more people than those participating in the supervision session (O'Donoghue, 2003).

### **The wider context of Supervision**

Supervision takes place in a context that may be summarised as the interaction of four systems: political, service, professional and practice. Research suggests that organisational climate, and associated perceptions of the work environment, have a profound and direct influence on a number of important outcomes including leader behaviour and job satisfaction (James et al, 1990).

Additionally, organisations have cultures, which guide decision-making and shape the way that people behave, feel, contribute, interact and perform. The culture within many social work organisations has been increasingly shaped by successive governments, which set out a legislative framework, establish national targets and require inspection agencies to ensure that quality standards are being met. This has engendered significant changes in the management of all public sector organisations. Neo-Taylorist managerialism requires managers to achieve public sector reform through an integrated model of mission statements, target setting, performance management, outcome measures and service review (see Chapters 17 and 22). The resultant effect has been a diminution of professional autonomy and accountability, as the practitioner's performance becomes increasingly accountable to managers, often exhibiting aggressive and macho management styles (Hadley and Clough 1996). Clarke et al (2002) noted that the most visible shift might be witnessed in the growth in the number of public sector managers and their power relative to other organisational groups.

Nevertheless, alternative models of Transformational and Transactional leadership approaches have been recommended as good practice by academics such as Alimo-Metcalfe (2000). Whilst Transactional leadership is concerned with day-to-day operational needs - such as planning, budgeting, staffing, the working environment – Transformational leadership is aimed at the process of engendering higher levels of motivation and commitment among followers.

Furthermore, Adams et al (2005: 13) define transformational practice as one that “moves beyond managerialism and accountability primarily to the organisation, and asserts accountability to professional values, principles and approaches as well”. This recognises that leaders are required to adopt a supportive and facilitative approach to achieve optimum working conditions for practitioners, and therefore optimum outcomes for service users.

In supervision this transformational practice, which has an inextricable relationship with Double Loop Learning, may be achieved through the facilitation of learning that explores and understands organisational systems. This form of transformation is characterised by total employee involvement in a process of collaboratively conducted, collectively accountable change directed towards shared values and principles. Crucial to this process is that the supervisor is not the teacher but part of this collaborative learning and re-learning process.

### **Inter-professional Supervision - learning from health models**

As we have seen, the tensions between the use of supervision as a tool of surveillance and as a mechanism for support are well documented. The solution within the health arena has been to distinguish between *management supervision* (to perform the necessary normative and some formative functions – often referred



to as *clinical governance*) and *practice supervision* (with more focus on formative and restorative functions).

Management supervision/clinical governance sets work objectives, ensures agency compliance and assures the quality of service received by patients and service users. Because of the fears that singular supervision frameworks would lead to the predominance of appraisal, censure and managerial control - linked with a concomitant erosion of professional autonomy (see Butterworth and Faugier, 1992) - the need was perceived for a professional supervisory relationship alongside but explicitly separate from the managerial relationship. Accordingly, the NHS Management Executive defined clinical (or practice) supervision as:

... a formal process of professional support and learning which enables individual practitioners to develop knowledge and competence, assume responsibility for their own practice, and enhance consumer protection and safety of care in complex situations.

(NHS Management Executive, 1993)

In health settings, it is the responsibility of the practitioner to ensure practice supervision takes place, by negotiating a supervisory relationship with an appropriate individual, in accordance with specified guidance about contact, frequency and duration. The United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) (1995) makes it clear that managerial supervision is not part of clinical supervision, which is designed to meet the support needs of practitioners. Indeed, an evaluative study by Butterworth et al (1997) concluded that it was the restorative function of the clinical supervision process that was the most valued by nurses.

Clinical supervision in a social work context could therefore take the form of a tripartite arrangement, where the supervisee is part of two separate processes. The first would aim to provide professional support and development, and being conducted with an agreed supervisor, such as a peer, whilst the second would aim to satisfy demands of accountability with the worker's line manager taking a key role. However, although these processes have different objectives both should be undertaken in an environment which values collaboration and agreement.

**Q.** Drawing on your own experiences of work and supervision, to what extent do you consider this to be an achievable aspiration?

## **Conclusion**

So, what of the future for social work practice and supervision, within emerging and developing inter-professional practice? As Jones states (1999: 42), "clinical supervision is concerned neither with management authority nor a therapeutic relationship", and it is precisely this focus on reflection, on professional support and development, that is potentially absent in the supervision model historically associated with social work and social care. We do not dispute the necessity for managerial surveillance, but the lack of professional support and development as experienced by practitioners is well documented. The following four modes of supervision are recognised in social work practice, with Type C being most evident in settings ruled by fear but without the capacity, or will, to engage in effective support processes.



and made more complex by cultural, socio-economic environments at the macro, meso and micro level, in addition to actors' own beliefs and perceptions.

**Key learning points:**

1. Supervision is mediated by a social, economical, cultural, political and technological context;
2. Regular, reliable and assured supervision is essential for all practitioners, in particular those newly qualified or entering new posts and roles;
3. Developmental and supportive supervision is the cornerstone of improving and assuring practice;
4. Supervision without the core ingredients of support, development and professional enhancement is little more than performance management and outcome surveillance;
5. Supervision is the pathway to reflective practice, the identification of staff training and development needs and the vehicle for service enhancement;
6. Within inter-professional contexts, the need for professional social work supervision will both be challenging to achieve and increasingly important.

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